

liberté, égalité, maturité'

benzene #48

march 26, 1989 (easter)

no, you didn't miss an issue; it really has been three months since the last issue (the orange one, with the sub list on the front page). in pubbing, being a few weeks overdue hasn't the same significance as it has in other approximately monthly phenomena, so it wasn't until this month that i started to worry about being late. though i do like writing bz, there are other things in life which i also like, and in the year's early months, those things have kept me quite occupied. bruce geryk would say such priorities make me somewhat less crazed than the other crazed wackos, but he also says, "i cannot personally endorse a zine which basically exists so that the editor has someone to talk to." that's what keeps me from folding, so have to assume bruce doesn't approve of bz.

the geryk quote comes from the collection of miscellaneous robert sacks quasi-zeens stapled together and sent to me, which i actually looked at this time. in it, mr sacks exhorts readers to "not deal with under any circumstances" bz charter subbers bruce linsey and mark berch, who are (in capital letters no less) "enemy of the hobby #1" and "enemy of the hobby #2" respectively. readers are also advised not to deal with chris carrier, so mr carrier is presumably the favorite to be designated enemy of the hobby #3, a title he will no doubt relish. other choice tidbits: about praxis, "allegedly a neutral forum for the dark side, the dark side has awarded this zine first place in the 1988 runestone poll"; and my favorite, "it should be pointed out that the title 'miller number custodian under the covenant' is the full and formal title of the one-and-only legitimate miller number custodian, parallel in construction to president of the united states of america under the constitution, queen of the u.k. under the act of settlement, and pope under canon law. to claim that someone else is miller custodian but not under the covenant is actually a claim that that other person is a usurper."

is this guy for real?

this is benzene, an approximately monthly amateur newsletter, loosely associated with the postal diplomacy hobby, which consists primarily of discussions of politics and whatever else interests the editor and the readership. there is an opening in postal monopoly (rules herein); carrier and larzelere are signed up, two more are needed. postal scrabble is open to all kibitzers. bz is published by ignatz jerome "mark" lew, 438 vernon #103, oakland, CA 94610; telephone (415) 268-8626. sub rates are 60¢ per issue, and trades are welcome. this is perhaps a good time to remind the readers that it is bz's express policy that when i fold (as eventually i will) all subscription funds will be confiscated and there will be no refunds. this is the actual policy of many zeens, but it is generally not admitted. if you aren't willing to gamble six dollars on the chance that i'll keep pubbing for a while, perhaps you ought to find a different zeen to subscribe to.

reader survey: next time you drop me a line, answer the following: on the whole, was the french revolution a good or a bad thing? yes, i know that's a very very broad thing to consider. interpret the question how ever you see fit (that's part of what i'm curious about). a simple one-word answer will satisfy me, but essays won't be refused.

i've been seeing lots and lots of singing action since last issue. too much, really. for a while i was rehearsing for three different concerts, and i started feeling an urge to drop out of all of them. those are over now and i'm down to just the opera (next show: la traviata). i don't regret the time i spend singing, i just regret the time i don't have to do something else -- like clean up my apartment, or read books, or compose, or sit around and do nothing (well, i usually find the time to squeeze that one in), or write more benzenes, or play with my new toy, which isn't all that new anymore.

i went out and bought a C compiler a few weeks ago. i don't have any immediate plans to do anything for which basic wouldn't be adequate, but i know i'm going to want to work in C eventually, so i figured i may as well relearn it now. doug and i

did some C programming together a few years ago and now i get to discover how dependent on him i was for certain things. i did quite a bit of coding and debugging on my own, but he always ran the compiler and made sure that all the libraries we used were included and in the right place and all that stuff. i never bothered to learn exactly how it worked. but now my explorations in the computing world have come to a stop again as circumstances have reminded me that one really does need a printer to get any serious work done. most of the stuff i want to examine (notably other people's programs) is on disk and trying to read it off the screen is not even close to practical.

spending money is not something i'm predisposed to doing quickly, so it'll probably be a few more weeks before i get around to buying a printer. when i do, i will presumably start doing benzene on the computer. i really hate dot-matrix type, but i'm sure i'll find it in myself to put up with it in exchange for the convenience. i still worry a little about what that will do to my writing style. i've noticed that people who write on word processors (including some pubbers i know) are far more likely to have a sloppy rambling style, and i know i'm susceptible to that. however, it is some comfort to remember that the word processor doesn't compel one to write poorly, it just allows him the option (especially if he edits on-screen rather than on a printout).

GOSSIP

well, the inauguration has come and gone (yeah, yeah, this is old stuff that's been piling up), as has the super bowl. by all accounts, this year's was, unusually, a good game, though that didn't stop me from getting bored in the middle of the third quarter. i can only absorb about two hours of football a day, even if it is the super bowl. i was not at all impressed by their sorry excuse for a half-time show, which i considered tawdry in conception and inept in execution. if i wanted to watch a disorganized crowd flouncing about not quite in tandem, i could visit a local dance club. come on, guys, this is supposed to be the super bowl -- the big event, yknow? i wasn't expecting busby berkeley, but jeez, i've seen better staging in community theater. what did they think, that because it was in 3-D they could get away with not hiring a decent choreographer?

i did quite enjoy the pre-game festivities, though. of course i'd have liked it better if they had a real singer sing the national anthem, but as pop singers go, billy joel isn't so bad, and i was very grateful that he sang it straight and resisted the temptation to add some ridiculous personal "interpretation."

i also enjoyed the other american ritual of the weekend, the inauguration. for the first time in my life i found myself able to admire the president in his capacity of head of state. since the end of the campaign (during which his behavior was quite ugly), mr bush has gone back to being a swell, upper-class sort of fellow, and i like that. those of you who read my praises of al gore last year will recall that i'm fond of the american aristocracy. many of its members work hard but without that sort of nervous ambitiousness i see in those who worked their way up through politics (e.g., gehardt, dukakis) which gives me the uneasy feeling that they're out to prove something. many of our aristocrats are driven instead by a sort of neo-noblesse oblige, which is if not endearing at least useful.

bush critics will complain that i'm taking seriously that which is merely image. i know that, but image is neither unreal nor irrelevant, i think. of course, they are quite right that it's no substitute for policy, and after i recovered from the giddiness of the post-inaugural period (during which i thought i might soon be calling myself a republican -- which, if my mail is any indication, would please my liberal and conservative readers alike), i find myself as bored by bush as are all the other political junkies. i wish to dispute, however, their common accusation that bush has been slow getting started. his critics have forgotten his promptness in addressing the impending insolvency of the FSLIC. as someone said (FDIC chairman william seidman, i think), with this problem it is less important exactly what is done about it, than that something is done about it. reagan and congress had allowed it to grow worse by ignoring it for eight years, but bush, after a false start, put together a dull, compromise plan that promises to find its way through the bureaucracy with a minimum of fuss. what matters is not who is made to pay for the money

TOWER CREATURES



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already lost, but that potentially errant S&Ls are either re-regulated or denied further protection, so that further debt is not incurred. (i'm assuming that this will be included in the plan, though come to think of it, i don't know for sure that it is.)

the administration has accomplished a bit more than nothing on the budget as well. given that the no-new-taxes pledge has already been made, i think the bush team has made a promising start. there are big disagreements to come, no doubt, especially about the capital gains tax cut (which this free-market liberal opposes, by the way), but my feeling is that things will be worked out a lot more smoothly than one would have reasonably expected four months ago.

i'm inclined to agree with the common opinion that bush's visionlessness is most acute in the realm of foreign policy. james baker is being openly criticized in the mainstream press for the first time in eight years, the primary critic being the new republic, with fred barnes leading the charge. true TNR toady that i am, i too have come to be less impressed with mr baker than i once was. furthermore, i can't help but notice that he isn't have even close to the influence in the administration that we all thought he would. the most obvious evidence of this is how john tower's nomination was handled.

as soon as the democrats on the armed services committee recommended rejection of the nomination, the administration ought to have stopped trying to find a way to get tower confirmed and started looking for a way to let him go without weakening the presidency. if baker were in charge he'd have managed to do exactly that. instead, by the last week it had gotten to the point where one had to ask whether it would have been worth it for the president even if he had managed to get tower confirmed. the argument advanced by republicans that senate confirmation would vindicate tower is merely an unconvincing attempt at prescriptive prediction. at the very least his authority would have been compromised; i believe furthermore that he would have been unable to keep his pledge, would be caught drinking, and would thus subject his president to yet another period of controversy. i am also unconvinced by the argument that by winning this battle, bush would have tamed the senate. quite to the contrary, i think the senate would have been all the more eager to win the next partisan fight (which would very likely be about something more important than this) and five democrats and perhaps a few republicans would owe bush one less favor than before. neither do i consider it a great political victory for the democrats to have prevailed (though the republicans didn't help themselves by describing the vote as a test of which branch of government will decide defense policy), as many democrats now feel a need to prove that they aren't being partisan. indeed, with respect to future dealings with the senate, bush is better off having lost. the real damage to the administration came not because the fight was lost, but because it occurred at all. regardless of how it might have turned out, the administration's image was tarnished, and, more important, ability to control the media's agenda was sacrificed for many weeks.

hendrik hertzberg and patrick buchanan (i don't know who was first) are correct to say that sam nunn's "halo is dented" as a result of his role in this drama, but i think his national reputation has improved for it. he has advantageously exchanged image quality for image quantity. nunn got more publicity out of this issue than he has ever gotten before. although he may not have planned it this way (i believe he didn't), he certainly recognized, as did his senate colleagues, that his chances of

4 becoming a leading figure in the party depended a lot on how he looked in this confrontation. there are some who have jumped to the conclusion that nunn is running for president. i don't believe it. i doubt that he wants it badly enough to go through the trouble of a national campaign, and even if he does, he is, much more than jesse jackson even, too far from the democratic party's mainstream to win a primary. but like jackson, he is likely to have an influence in deciding who the nominee is. if, as is widely predicted, the democrats have a major intra-party struggle in the next year or two, nunn is likely to be the leader of the conservative wing of the party. if he prevails, that could pave the way for the nomination of a more moderate conservative democrat (e.g., chuck robb or al gore). that's why the tower nomination was impossible for the republicans to win. usually, if a republican minority wins a mostly partisan vote, it does so by winning over conservative southern democrats. but this time, the very senators whom bush might have been likely to persuade (e.g., johnston, breaux, robb, shelby) were the very ones who were most interested in making nunn look good -- because they want to see the party move his direction.

incidentally, i am pleased to see tower rejected. i've been around alcoholics enough to know that the real problem with them is not that they might show up drunk one day (many of them don't ever get drunk at all) but just their general erraticness and compulsiveness. my problem with tower is not that he drinks, but that he has (i think) a personality defect, and his pledge to stop drinking only made that problem seem worse. tower's defenders like to cite winston churchill and ulysses grant and other heavy drinkers who were successful (though grant didn't do too well in the long run, come to think of it), but tower doesn't seem much like them to me. the political figure whom tower reminds me of most is bud macfarlane, and i'm not too thrilled with how he turned out.

i do realize that this is just one way of saying i'm glad tower was defeated simply because i don't like the guy (and if i were a senator i wouldn't want to have to defend my vote on such grounds, so i'd vote with my party in either case). i'm not concerned by the warnings of some republicans that the senate is usurping the president's power to name his cabinet. i'll start worrying about that when the senate starts turning down cabinet nominations in large numbers. the way it is now, and the way it has been for a long time, is that the senate can get away with one every now and then, and this time it happened to be tower. that's fine with me.

MONOPOLY

chris carrier and mark larzelere have expressed interest in playing postal monopoly. i will start this game when i have four players signed up -- no more, no less. as promised, following are bz's postal monopoly rules:

1) standard monopoly rules apply except where contradicted below. note that according to standard rules, no money is awarded for landing on free parking.

2) play is divided into game turns which are divided into phases. there are no individual player turns. all movement is simultaneous: each player's token is considered to arrive at its destination simultaneously; and if a player, by rolling doubles, lands his token in more than one space in a single turn, it is considered to arrive in each space simultaneously.

3) the eight phases of the game turn are: movement, deals, bank windfalls, bank debts, player debts, player windfalls, purchases, and developments. players may make orders for a phase conditional on the results of any preceding phase.

4) during the movement phase, the gm rolls dice for each player and moves tokens accordingly and picks cards for players landing on chance or community chest spaces. in the game report, gm reports which tokens land where, what windfalls players will receive from the bank, what debts players owe to the bank and to each other, and which players are eligible to buy which properties.

5) during the deals phase, players may, by mutual agreement, exchange cash, undeveloped property, cards, and forgiveness of debt obligations. (note that buildings and developed properties may not be exchanged.) in their orders, players describe what deals they wish to transact. any deal which is equivalently and unambiguously ordered by all parties involved will be carried out by the gm. gm will report only those deals which are carried out.

6) in the bank windfalls phase, any salaries or windfalls due to a player from the bank are awarded to that player. also during this phase, a player may order to break down any buildings he owns, or to mortgage any undeveloped property he owns. 5

7) during the bank debts phase, any debts owed to the bank by a player are subtracted from the player's cash supply. if the player has insufficient cash on hand to pay his debts, his buildings and property are subject to involuntary break down and mortgaging as described in rule 12. if the player cannot raise enough cash to pay his debts, he is bankrupt as described in rule 13.

8) during the player debts phase, rent owed by a player to another player is taken from the owing player. (it is not necessary for the owed player to "notice" the debt.) if the player has insufficient cash on hand to pay his debts, his buildings and property are subject to involuntary break down and mortgaging as described in rule 12. if the player cannot raise enough cash to pay his debts, he is bankrupt as described in rule 13.

9) during the player windfalls phase, debts collected from owing players during the player debts phase are given to the owed players. if a player goes bankrupt during the player debts phase, his property is given to his creditor during this phase.

10) when a player's token lands on an unowned property that property is up for sale, and any player whose token landed on it this turn is eligible to buy it. (note that due to simultaneous movement, more than one player may be eligible to buy a single property.) a player may, in his orders, offer to buy any property for which he is eligible, either at the property's listed price, or at a higher price which he names. any player may offer an auction bid on any property up for sale.

any property up for sale is, during the purchases phase, sold to the eligible buyer who offers the highest price. if two or more eligible buyers offer the same price and it is the highest offered, the property remains unsold. if no eligible buyer offers to buy a property, it is sold to the player who offers the highest auction bid. if a property goes to auction and two or more players offer the same price and it is the highest offered, the property remains unsold.

gm will report all offers from eligible buyers. if and only if a property goes to auction, gm will report all auction bids.

a player may offer bids which total more than his available cash. if a player's orders result in him purchasing properties at a price higher than his available cash on hand, his buildings and property are subject to involuntary break down and mortgaging as described in rule 12. if the player cannot raise enough cash to pay for the properties he is to buy, all his purchasing orders for the turn are void, and the purchasing phase is re-adjudicated without his orders.

11) during the development phase, a player may order the purchase of houses and hotels, either at the listed price, or at a higher price which he names. (a player may offer different prices for different buildings.) in the event of a housing shortage, disputed buildings will be sold to the player offering the highest difference between list price and offered price. also during this phase a player may order to unmortgage any mortgaged property he owns.

12) players are generally expected to raise cash to pay their debts by ordering any necessary break down or mortgaging during the bank windfalls phase. however, if a player has insufficient cash on hand when a debt is due, the gm will mortgage property or break down buildings for him. undeveloped properties will be mortgaged before buildings will be broken down. gm will mortgage or break down whichever of the player's buildings or properties is farthest clockwise around the board from Go, and will continue to do so until sufficient cash has been raised to pay the debts.

13) if a player is unable to raise enough cash to pay his debts, he is bankrupt (regardless of any money he may be owed in a subsequent phase). a bankrupt player's buildings are broken down, but his property is not mortgaged (except as described below). any mortgaging ordered by the player that turn is undone.

in the case where a bankrupt player is indebted to two or more players in a single turn, all the bankrupt player's property is mortgaged, the cash raised is equally divided among the creditors, and the mortgaged property is awarded to the

creditor to whom the bankrupt player owes most. if the creditors are owed equally, property is given to the bank.

14) miscellaneous: after the last card in a deck is drawn, the deck is reshuffled. unless he orders otherwise, a player landing on income tax is assumed to owe the lesser amount. (he is not required to decide before counting his money.) fractional dollars are always rounded against the player in favor of the bank.

note that in all cases where a player bids on a property or building and purchases it, he pays the price of his bid, regardless of whether other players also bid.

i think that covers everything. questions and comments are welcome, of course.

SCRABBLE

it seems like the longer i extend the deadline, the fewer responses i get. why is that?

rack B must be jinxed. with this turn it has seen four different players in four turns. player number 3 was pete gaughan who offered, "i have so little time this week it's disheartening. so as i sit here, all i can come up with is 9H:lapis, for whatever it's worth ((?)). what i wouldn't give for an N (B9:siphon)."

well, it is a lousy rack, but one can do better than that. mark larzelere offers, "i suggest here 10B:rips;shay=18. you've got to use at least one of those I's and as many letters as possible to try to draw some better tiles. i find it hard to find a good play here. you're left with UII and have to pray for good letters. "no, better is 10B:pirs;shay=22.

"shay: a slow wood-burning geared locomotive used especially for hauling logs to a mill. (webster's 3rd) pir: a muslim spiritual guide or saint in india or pakistan."

as it turns out, 10B:pirs is not better than 10B:rips, because the OSPD doesn't list pir (demonstrating once again my point that the OSPD doesn't really list all the obscure words, it just seems to). i assume that "webster's 3rd" refers to the third new international, which is one of those monster dictionaries (the best, i think, besides the OED) which no doubt lists hundreds of useful scrabble words not allowed by OSPD.

this leaves me with a minor gming dilemma. mark's "orders" seem to indicate that 10B:pirs is his play of choice, and since it is, by virtue of its challengeability, inferior to pete's 9H:lapis, i ought to accept the latter. however, the whole point of the kibitzer rule was to get the best suggested play on the board, which clearly is 10B:rips, and that is what i want to do. if i were looking for a bruxian rules rationalization, i could argue that 10B:pirs isn't legal and since mark sort of suggested both 10B:rips and 10B:pirs, he has actually submitted only one legal order. but unfortunately that is easily refuted by the argument that it's perfectly legal to play a word not in the dictionary, hoping the other guy won't challenge it.

i have made it perfectly clear that i am not opposed to constructive gm interference in any game -- not least by choosing to gm only games (such as deviant dip and kibitzer's scrabble) which by their rules require gm judgement calls. to me, the question of what is "fair" is relevant only in terms of who gets hurt. the only plausible victims of me accepting 10B:rips are chuff (rack A player) and pete. considering what i know of them, i'm confident that neither will feel cheated. my only real concern is that kibitzers might make the game more confusing for me by suggesting a bunch of different orders and not specifying which is the real one. after some reflection, i've decided i'm willing to put up with that, and if it leads to further dilemmas, i'll ~~attempt~~ solve them when they come up.

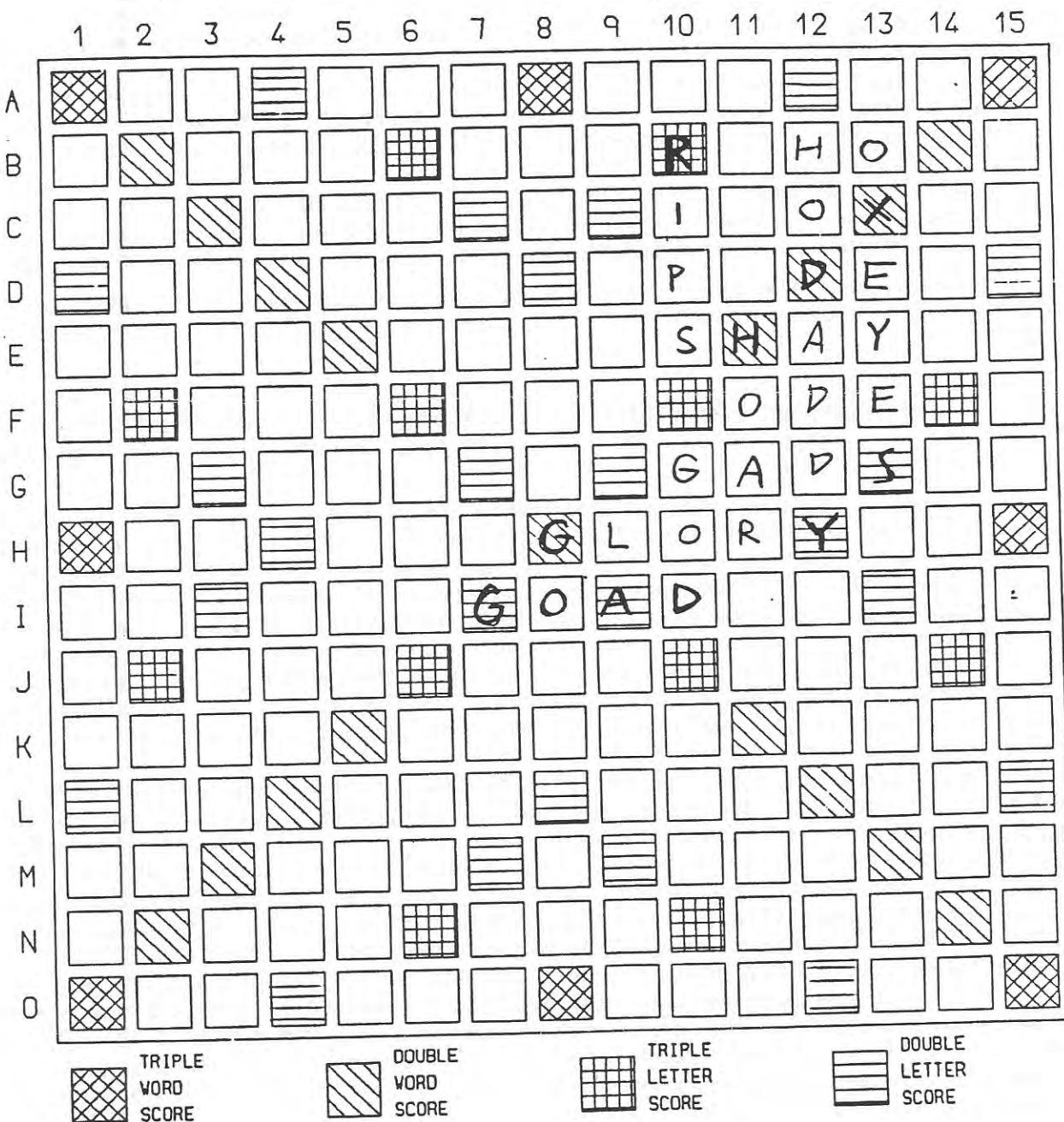
so 10B:rips;shay is accepted and mark larzelere is the new player for rack B.

i think i need to recruit some more serious scrabble players to benzene (pubbers can consider that a plug request). obviously you guys aren't working too hard. i see three plays which i prefer to 10B:rips: my favorite, 10B:iris;shay, uses the same idea but sacrifices two points in order to dispose of a second I -- well worth it.

KIBITZER'S SCRABBLE

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A=1
B=3
C=3
D=2
E=1
F=4
G=2
H=4
I=1
J=8
K=5
L=1
M=3
N=1
O=1
P=3
Q=10
R=1
S=1
T=1
U=1
V=4
W=4
X=8
Y=4
Z=10



Your rack contains:

A E I L T U V

The score is:

114 - 109

↑
(You)

(the other rack contains: I I U)

WHAT WOULD YOU DO? Send your orders to: mark d lew
438 vernon, #103
oakland, ca 94610

furthermore, it doesn't open up the A8 triple word score to a play like A8:vat;trips. (oops, there i go spilling the beans again. see note below.)

also good were J9:psi;lap,gods=20 and J10:sirup;gods=23. J10:sirup gets a good score and, more important, turns over five tiles. unfortunately it also leaves lots of openings. J9:psi is more cautious, but still leaves a hood at K11 for, e.g., K11:tail;it=12.

it is possible to beat sirup's 23 points, by the way. 14A:up;hop scores 24. the big problem with it is that it leaves all three I's in the rack. it also leaves an opening at A15 if chuff draws an E or a blank (38.4% chance, i calculate), e.g., 15A:telia;ut,hope=33.

note below: keep in mind that this is a commentary game. i make comments only after a play has been made and before the next tiles are drawn. i've said nothing here that couldn't have been deduced by looking at the board shown in the last issue.

and now that i'm done commenting, i will draw the tiles: the score is now 114-109. IIU remains on rack B. chuff draws two tiles and rack A now contains AEILTUV.

LETTERS

i have a problem i know most other pubbers envy: a surfeit of letters for the letter column. many of them i can't bear to cut, though, so we have to go all the way back to november:

ed wrobel (11/10): "david hood wrote that he takes issue with the point i made about balancing the rights of smokers and breathers, citing an error of phrasing. it appears to me that we are actually in agreement. hood asserts there is no right to pollute. pollution, however, is an inevitable by-product of the exercise of other rights, such as smoking, driving cars, and manufacturing. there is no free-market incentive to curb pollution; in fact, the additional cost and inconvenience is a disincentive. this is not an area in which the government that governs least, governs best. ((i agree.)) the individual consumer cannot monitor pollution levels, trace the origin of the pollutant and refuse to patronize the polluters. the government must be involved.

"any discussion about 'drugs' will be incoherent unless the participants specify the drug in question. marijuana, alcohol, heroin, crack, nicotine and PCP do not have the same effects on an individual's mental and physical functioning. it is naive to assert that the law should treat them the same. i would prefer to see advertising for alcohol and tobacco products banned and government subsidies for the tobacco industry eliminated. marijuana should be treated like alcohol and tobacco. britain's opiate program should be tried here. crack and PCP will never be decriminalized. they present high risks for the individual and for society.

"... ((in the presidential election)) i was amused to read that nevada permits a 'none-of-the-above' vote, which tallied almost 7,000 votes, about 25% of the state's total. i wonder what that might have been in the rest of the country. it certainly would not have swung any southern states but i wonder if it could have affected the outcome in some of the closer states.

"and, will the aging of the baby boom move the country further to the right? i've certainly mellowed as i've aged but i still can't imagine voting for a politician whose 'issues' are waving the flag and compelling children to pledge allegiance to liberty and justice for all. (do i detect a hint of dissonance? what do libertarians think of that?) some exit poll results showed bush winning 18- to 24-year-olds and duke winning 25- to 29-year-olds. i don't see any other age break downs in the paper today. i recall a comment by bruce morton on election night that the gender gap was apparent in some states but not in others."

me: in deference to the half dozen bz readers who have complained about too much bush v dukakis material (and the half dozen more who no doubt agree with them but haven't said so), i've cut the bulk of the post-election analysis. hang in there, guys, after this issue we should be done with dukakis at least, though it looks like

the other guy will be around for a while.

i'd hate to see marijuana "treated like alcohol and tobacco" for the simple and selfish reason that marijuana stinks to high heaven and i'd be miserable if when i walked outside on my lunch hour i had to smell the joints of my fellow pedestrians. san francisco stinks enough as it is. ... ed koch has said repeatedly that the british opiate program was an admitted failure, yet you and mark berch both cite it as a model to emulate. who's right? ... which candidate do you think it would have taken votes from if none-of-the-above were allowed. i think it would have taken from both about equally. ... i think that the aging of the baby boom will make the country more conservative in the traditional sense of the word, but not further to the right. ... to me, the curious thing about the gender gap is why it isn't bigger. men and women are so different in terms of what conditions make them feel secure and what opportunities make them feel free, that i'd expect to see more than the usual 5% difference which turned up again this year. ... this quasi-libertarian thinks that compelling children to recite the pledge is a ridiculous and unamerican idea, and he is inclined to agree with the sentiment that a country that seeks to secure its citizens' allegiance by compulsion probably doesn't deserve that allegiance. (he also recognizes that the pledge was a campaign issue for cosmetic reasons and therefore doesn't pay too much attention to it.)

julie martin (11/13): "what's happened to you? you used to be such a perceptive boy. john kennedy must have felt that 'jack' was a personal nickname to be used by his friends, but not by the newspapers. besides, 'jfk' is better for headlines anyway -- it's one letter shorter, and it has high resolution (visibility and instant 'recognizability.')

"re your question of issue #43, 'one cannot be propagandized without one's consent': theoretically, you are correct. if one has infinite resources to check out first-hand everything one is told, one cannot be propagandized. practically, however, there comes a time when one must accept something on faith if one is ever to be able to function effectively. you need some axioms to build your theorems. and there opens the door allowing propaganda to slip in. one reason i've waffled about ever having children is that i want them to be able to think for themselves, yet i must give them some basics to build on."

me: my advice, for what little it may be worth, is to have the kids. you may doubt the adequacy of your parenting skills, but you are at least a decent and sane person with good sense, and that alone makes you better qualified than a great many folks who won't hesitate to reproduce. besides, i think you'll enjoy it. ... your jfk argument is sound. i concede that he may well have been lloyd's good fried. ... your propaganda argument makes sense at its own level, and it might be relevant to a discussion of the foundation of one's philosophy of life, but it's hardly relevant to the issue of personal responsibility for consumer decisions. one need not have infinite resources to decide whether or not smoking is cool because the marlboro man smokes and he's cool.

ed wrobel (11/15): "i was just rereading your leader for issue #44 about freedom, equality, and liberalism. egalitarian sounds like a nice word to me but i suppose it's an "e-word" to free-market enthusiasts. why must freedom and equality be 'conflicting objectives'? does not equality of opportunity generate greater freedom? and what freedom are we talking about -- the freedom of dan quayle to use his wealth and social position to enter law school despite his lack of qualifications? (kind of an anti-affirmative action program, eh?)"

me: i don't know why you're so bent out of shape ove dan using an affirmative action program to get into law school. giving a position to a less qualified candidate is the very essence of affirmative action. if the candidate were qualified, he wouldn't need the program's help.

equality of opportunity does indeed go hand-in-hand with freedom. i doubt you can find a free-market enthusiasts who isn't completely in favor of it. but to us it sounds very much like egalitarians demand equality of results as well. in the

10 minds of many egalitarians under-representation of a minority group in a certain occupation, company, or what-not, is ipso facto proof of discrimination against that group. this is not just bad statistics; it's a different way of looking at the world. the essential difference between libertarians and egalitarians is their perception of free will: a pure libertarian is a solipsist, and a pure egalitarian is a fatalist. between those extremes, libertarians are more inclined to hold individuals responsible for what they do while egalitarians are more inclined to look for external influences which cause the individual to act how he does. thus if two individuals are reaping the unequal fruits of their labors, the libertarian will tend to assume that the reaper with the larger reward has proved himself a better laborer in this instance, but the egalitarian will interpret the unequal rewards as an indication that the other reaper has somehow been disadvantaged ("unequal opportunity") and must be compensated.

chuff afflerbach (11/18): "in my treatise on the yellowstone fires, it appears you left out a sentence or a line in the middle of the page. maybe nobody else noticed, but i usually make more sense than that. i hope.

"maybe my mind is just a cesspool of worthless information, and if so, then i've found a home in benzene. but i thought everyone knew that general motors bought up the red car line in los angeles back in the thirties. they then tore out a massive system of electric trolley cars and replaced them with dirty, smoke-belching monsters from their own assembly line. pretty much like roger rabbit described it. is there more to the story?

"and your joke about ted turner colorizing 'gone with the wind' was a good one, wasn't it? a joke i mean? part of selznik's purpose was to put the new, state-of-the-art technicolor through all its paces. or did i miss something again?"

me: you're right, i did leave out a sentence in your letter. i was going to include it here so readers could pencil it into the old issue (you guys do save old issues, right?) but i can't find the original letter anymore. unfortunately, you aren't the only victim of transcription errors around here. in addition to my usual innocuous typos, i recently made the mistake of calling richard lugar a democrat (i make the same mistake about myself, some would say) and something else which also embarrassed me when i first notice but which i can't even recall now. maybe when i start doing bz on a computer most of them will go away.

the gone with the wind gaffe was not a typo, but a simple brain lapse. siskel and ebert really were getting all worked up over some classic that ted was colorizing, but it wasn't gwtw. casablanca maybe? i don't remember.

the GM story was news to me. jim-bob will be glad to know that one of the other cesspools in benzene's network carries the same brand of sewage.

boyoboy, it's bad enough that i start my letter column with letters from november, but now i'm ending it that way, too. but the next one gets me bogged down in a discussion that's sure to put this issue over an ounce. bz#49 and #50 ought to have eight pages of letters each....

ZEEN STUFF

i spent my first seven years in the dip hobby in anchorage, alaska, so now when i read about dipcon, by habit i think of it as something way far away that other people go to. i only recently came to realize that i might actually consider attending this year. i hate to lose a weekend, and i hate to head for lower latitudes in the middle of july, but on the other hand the idea of a few days of non-stop gaming and meeting long-time correspondents has a certain appeal. i find myself ambivalent (i.e., stay home). however, as my friends know, i respond well to coaxing. go ahead, persuade me.

brux has announced that his zeen poll this year will include "zines which don't deal with dip, but whose participants are mostly in the dip hobby," so you can still vote for benzene.

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the big news in the dip hobby, viewed from a broader perspective, is that just when we were beginning to worry that dipdom was turning into a hobby of old farts, there has been an exaltation of new zeen starts, almost exactly a decade after the bumper crop of '79 which brought us such greats as volkerwanderung, retaliation, emhain macha, voice of doom, murd'ring ministers, and cheesecake.

benzene zeen-rating scale:

- * i don't read this zeen.
- ** i eventually get around to reading this zeen.
- *** if i'm in a grumpy mood it cheers me up to find this zeen in my mailbox.
- **** i eagerly await this zeen's next issue.

leader of this year's brat pack, by virtue of seniority (though a benzene-like sabbatical leaves him with about the same issue number as the others) is mark lilleleht's the scribblerist.

around christmas-time mark bet me that he could postpone his next issue longer than i could postpone mine. i took the little upstart up on it, and after only a few months he has given in and ts#7 is out. ts, and especially its letter column, is suffused with a youthful spirit which infects all the contributors, not just the editor (who, truth to be told, isn't a whole lot younger than i am). if you're interested in discussions of broad, cosmic, vague, and largely irrelevant questions like the progress (or regress) of human civilization, and what it means to believe in god, you'll find what you like in this zeen. to me, it's reminiscent of a high school student discovering plato's cave allegory for the first time ("oh wow, and maybe the outside world is, like, just a shadow of another level of reality!" yeah, uh huh). ts is like a slobbering, snotty-nosed baby: pretty disgusting, really, but so genuine that it's adorable nonetheless.

(the scribblerist***, mark lilleleht, p.o. box 3166, charlottesville, VA 22903-0166)

mcdonalds, after making a liar out of me by not switching to paper sandwich cartons when they said they would, tried to appease me by giving me a winning ticket in the latest version of their perpetual sweepstakes -- not the new scrabble game, but the "splash for cash" game, the one in which the tickets were attached to the cups. my ticket says "1 discount trip package for two to disneyland." i have no desire to go to disneyland, so i haven't taken the time to find out what this discount package includes (nor do i know if the offer expires), but i assume that information can be obtained at any mcdonalds store. if you want my ticket, let me know. i'm ready to give it to anyone who can think up a good reason for me to do so. (yes, sending money counts as a good reason.)

MORE GOSSIP

i read somewhere that of all the members of the bush team, the least desired guest on the washington social circuit is lee atwater. strange, i consider him the one who would be most interesting to meet. who do they want to meet, robert mosbacher? bah, i'd rather stay home and watch tv. (by the way, most interesting is not the same as most likeable; though, like francois c, i've found that some of the most interesting people to talk to happen to be arrogant pigs.)

just in case i haven't sufficiently bored my subbers who aren't politically inclined, here are my early odds on the democratic party's presidential nominee in 1992: gephardt 6-1, biden 7-1, bradley 7-1, gore 8-1, cuomo 12-1, robb 20-1, jackson 25-1, mitchell 40-1, nunn 50-1, wirth 60-1, graham 60-1, clinton 70-1, schroeder 80-1, babbitt 80-1, simon 100-1, bentsen 150-1, dukakis 500-1.

bradley and cuomo are over-rated, as are most southerners (especially sam nunn). gore and gephardt are solid contenders and are being treated as such. under-rated is joe biden whom everyone seems to have forgotten but who could easily come back. also underrated is dark horse tim wirth. the mentioners haven't mentioned him yet, but he's got all the right credentials to be a come-out-of-nowhere candidate (especially if he catches the fancy of the hollywood money network).

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